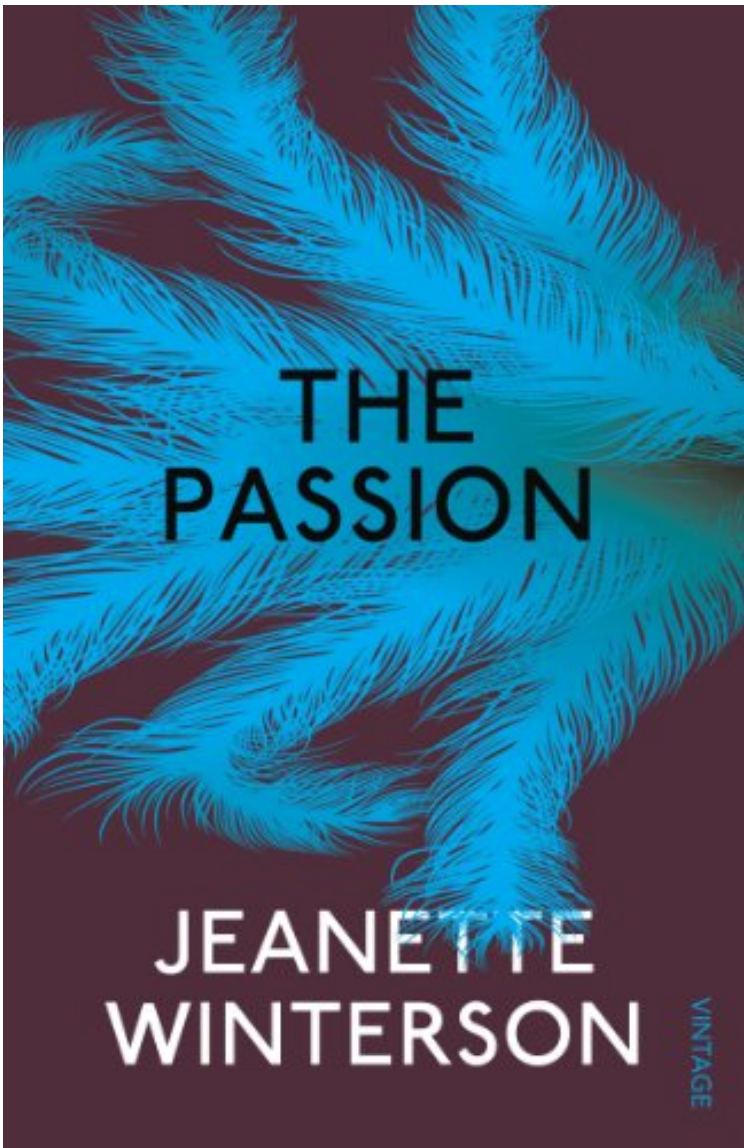


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# The Passion



*Par Jeanette Winterson  
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**Par Jeanette Winterson : The Passion** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Passion:

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**Description :** Description du produitSet during the tumultuous years of the Napoleonic Wars, *The Passion* intertwines the destinies of two remarkable people: Henri, a simple French soldier, who follows Napoleon from glory to Russian ruin; and Villanelle, the red-haired, web-footed daughter of a Venetian boatman, whose husband has gambled away her heart. In Venice's compound of carnival, chance, and darkness, the pair meet their singular destiny. In her unique and mesmerizing voice, Winterson blends reality with fantasy, dream, and imagination to weave a hypnotic tale with stunning effects.

Prsentation de l'diteurHenri had a passion for Napoleon and Napoleon had a passion for chicken. From Boulogne to Moscow Henri butchered for his Emperor and never killed a single man. Meanwhile, in Venice, the city of chance and disguises, Villanelle was born with the webbed feet of her boatman father - but in the

casinos she gambled her heart and lost. As the soldier-chef's love for Napoleon turns to hate he finds the Venetian beauty, and together they flee to the canals of darkness. 'It's a fantasy, a vivid dream... inventive and brilliant' Guardian 'As moving and funny as it is skilful, and reflects the author's formidable appetite for life' Sunday Times 'A book of great imaginative audacity and assurance...brilliantly physical (and funny) detail' Times Literary Supplement 'Its concentrated, beautifully detailed prose recalls the diction of fairy tales; its plot incorporates their magic, their shrewd wit and brutality...a deeply imagined and beautiful book, often arrestingly so' New York Times.com

In 1985 Jeanette Winterson won the Whitbread Award for best first fiction for the semi-autobiographical *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, an often wry exploration of lesbian possibility bumping up against evangelical fanaticism. She was 25. Two years later, *The Passion*, her third novel, appeared, the fantastical tale of Henri--Napoleon's cook--and Villanelle, a Venetian gondolier's daughter who has webbed feet (previously an all-male attribute), works as a croupier, picks pockets, cross-dresses, and literally loses her heart to a beautiful woman. Written in a lyrical and jolting combination of fairy tale diction and rhythm and the staccato, the book would be a risky proposition in lesser hands.

Winterson has said that she wanted to look at people's need to worship and examine what happens to young men in militaristic societies. The question was, how to do so without being polemical and didactic? Only she could have come up with such an exquisite answer. In the end, Henri, incarcerated on an island of madmen, becomes aware that his passion, "even though she could never return it, showed me the difference between inventing a lover and falling in love. The one is about you, the other about someone else." Extrait

Our companion loosed her laces but kept her boots on, and seeing my surprise at forgoing this unexpected luxury said, 'My father was a boatman. Boatmen do not take off their boots.' We were silent, either out of respect for her customs or sheer exhaustion, but it was she who offered to tell us her story if we chose to listen. 'A fire and a tale,' said Patrick. 'Now all we need is a drop of something hot,' and he fathomed from the bottom of his unfathomable pockets another stoppered jar of evil spirit. This was her story. I have always been a gambler. It's a skill that comes naturally to me like thieving and loving. What I didn't know by instinct I picked up from working the Casino, from watching others play and learning what it is that people value and therefore what it is they will risk. I learned how to put a challenge in such a way as to make it irresistible. We gamble with the hope of winning. But it's the thought of what we might lose that excites us. How you play is a temperamental thing; cards, dice, dominoes, jacks, such preferences are frills merely. All gamblers sweat. I come from the city of chances, where everything is possible but where everything has a price. In this city great fortunes are won and lost overnight. It has always been so. Ships that carry silk and spices sink, the servant betrays the master, the secret is out and the bell tolls another accidental death. But penniless adventurers have always been welcome here too, they are good luck and very often their good luck rubs off on themselves. Some who come on foot leave on horseback and others who trumpeted their estate beg on the Rialto. It has always been so. The astute gambler always keeps something back, something to play with another time; a pocket watch, a hunting dog. But the Devil's gambler keeps back something precious, something to gamble with only once in a lifetime. Behind the secret panel he keeps it, the valuable, fabulous thing that no one suspects he has. I knew a man like that; not a drunkard sniffing after every wager nor an addict stripping the clothes off his back rather than go home. A thoughtful man who they say had trade with gold and death. He lost heavily, as gamblers do; he won surprisingly, as gamblers do, but he never showed much emotion, never led me to suspect that much important was at stake. A hobbyist, I thought, dismissing him. You see, I like passion, I like to be among the desperate. I was wrong to dismiss him. He was waiting for the wager that would seduce him into risking what he valued. He was a true gambler, he was prepared to risk the valuable, fabulous thing but not for a dog or a cock or the casual dice. On a quiet evening, when the tables were half empty and the domino sets lay in their boxes, he was there, wandering, fluttering, drinking and flirting. I was bored. Then a man came into the room, not one of our regulars, not one any of us knew, and after a few half-hearted games of chance he spied this figure and engaged him in conversation. They talked for upwards of half an hour and so intently that we thought they must be old friends and lost our curiosity in the assumption of habit. But the rich man with his strangely bowed companion by his side asked leave to make an announcement, a most remarkable wager, and we cleared the central floor and let him speak. It seemed that his companion, this stranger, had come from the wastes of the Levant, where exotic lizards breed and all is unusual. In his country, no man bothered with paltry fortunes at the gaming table, they played for higher stakes. A life. The wager was a life. The winner should take the life of the loser in whatsoever way he chose. However slowly he chose, with whatever instruments he chose. What was certain was that only one life would be spared. Our rich friend was clearly excited. His eyes looked past the faces

and tables of the gaming room into a space we could not inhabit; into the space of pain and loss. What could it matter to him that he might lose fortunes? He had fortunes to lose. What could it matter to him that he might lose mistresses? There are women enough. What would it matter to him that he might lose his life? He had one life. He cherished it. There were those that night who begged him not to go on with it, who saw a sinister aspect in this unknown old man, who were perhaps afraid of being made the same offer and of refusing. What you risk reveals what you value. These were the terms. A game of three. The first, the roulette, where only fate is queen. The second, the cards, where skill has some part. The third, the dominoes, where skill is paramount and chance is there in disguise. Will she wear your colours? This is the city of disguises. The terms were agreed and strictly supervised. The winner was two out of three or in the event of some onlooker crying Nay! a tie, chosen at random, by the manager of the Casino. The terms seemed fair. More than fair in this cheating world, but there were still some who felt uneasy about the unknown man, unassuming and unthreatening as he seemed. If the Devil plays dice, will he come like this? Will he come so quietly and whisper in our ear? If he came as an angel of light, we should be immediately on our guard. The word was given: Play on. We drank throughout the first game, watching the red and black spin under our hands, watching the bright streak of metal dally with one number, then another, innocent of win or lose. At first it seemed as though our rich friend must win, but at the last moment the ball sprang out of its slot and spun again with that dwindling sickening sound that marks the last possible change. The wheel came to rest. It was the stranger whom fortune loved. There was a moment's silence, we expected some sign, some worry on one part, some satisfaction on another, but with faces of wax, the two men got up and walked to the optimistic baize. The cards. No man knows what they may hold. A man must trust his hand. Swift dealing. These were accustomed to the game. They played for perhaps an hour and we drank. Drank to keep our lips wet, our lips that dried every time a card fell and the stranger seemed doomed to victory. There was an odd sense in the room that the stranger must not win, that for all our sakes he must lose. We willed our rich friend to weld his wits with his luck and he did. At the cards, he won and they were even. The two men met each other's gaze for a moment before they seated themselves in front of the dominoes and in each face was something of the other. Our rich friend had assumed a more calculating expression, while his challenger's face was more thoughtful, less wolfish than before. It was clear from the start that they were evenly matched at this game too. They played deftly, judging the gaps and the numbers, making lightning calculations, baffling each other. We had stopped drinking. There was neither sound nor movement save the clicking of the dominoes on the marble table. It was past midnight. I heard the water lapping at the stones below. I heard my salvia in my throat. I heard the dominoes clicking on the marble table. There were no dominoes left. No gaps. The stranger had won.